

The Virtual Costumer

A monthly publication of the Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

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A message from the President of the Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

Greetings, as we get deeper into the Holiday Season.

I keep trying to do this column as a dialogue, but few of you out there respond. I hope you are all reading this anyway. We would just love to know for sure that the work the editor and the other volunteers are putting in is not being sent out into a fathomless void. Drop us an electronic note via the SiW list, just to reward our efforts and inspire us to plunge on.

I was looking today at a display of Xmas ornaments, contemplating their possible uses in costuming. I have at least one pair of ornament earrings I have used with a couple of different costumes. I have also taken the plastic bead strands meant for draping on a tree and used them both in masks and as trim on the anemones (Beneath Alien waves, NolaCon). There was a collection of red wired beads that might have made an excellent necklace, even for real world festive wear.

Are there other Christmas supplies that you have used for various costume functions? The after the season specials can be a good source for supplies, if you aren't entirely burned out at that point.

Sharing your hints and ideas would be a great benefit to us all.

I am just started on a Children's Theatre production and think I might finally get to try one of the neatest costume short cut suggestions I have heard. I have to create a large ruff for one character (think Millstone ruff, for those of you historically inclined). Many years ago it was suggested to a group of costumers that a ruff could be very easily made from the multilayer window shades, and I have been hankering to try it ever since.

If I do, I will share the results with you. If you have any miscellaneous clever costuming techniques lurking around in your mind somewhere, we would all be delighted were you to release them in our presence.

Dana

Web Site Spotlight

Or Never Leave an Artist Alone in Your House
by Sharon Trembley

Are you aware that museums are now featuring on-line or virtual exhibits on their web sites?

They can be from past exhibits and the web pages are left active on their site, or originally presented as a purely virtual exhibit.

One that has repeatedly caught my attention is on the Smithsonian Institute's site regarding The Peacock Room –

<http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/current/peacock.htm>

The associated story with how this room came about is somewhat humorous since it wasn't my house.



The Princess from the Land of Porcelain,
Whistler 1863-4, Smithsonian Institute

Frederick R. Leyland, a wealthy London shipowner, had purchased the painting above called *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* by James McNeill Whistler (1834 – 1903).

Leyland hung it in a place of honor in his dining room where he also exhibited his extensive collection of Chinese porcelain.

Leyland hired interior architect, Thomas Jeckyll, to redecorate the room. Jeckyll constructed lattice shelving and installed gilded leather on the walls. Leyland consulted with Whistler on what color to paint the shutters and door because there was concern that red would clash with Whistler's painting.

Whistler volunteered to retouch some of the room with touches of yellow, and thinking the job nearly complete, Leyland went back to work in Liverpool.

Rather than retouching some prior paintwork, Whistler was inspired by the room and took matters into his own hands.



Central Shutters, east side,
Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room,
Whistler 1876-7, Smithsonian Institute

Of course, this overexuberance and Whistler's habit of lavishly entertaining in this room while Leyland was away led to a bitter dispute over Whistler's fees.



Southwest Corner of *Harmony in Blue and Gold*:
The Peacock Room, Whistler 1876-1877.

The MacShapiro Tartan

Dana MacDermott

This is a true story taken from the intersection of history, costuming and a particular contemporary world view.

My brother, Daniel is, in his own words, *an aficionado of Scottish country dance*. He has also performed Georgian folk dancing in the past, but has turned his affection and participation in the last decade to Scottish dance. Daniel did many a Scottish country dance performance over the years in borrowed kilts, and finally decided to obtain one of his own. He was then faced with a dilemma. What tartan should he select for his kilt? Again, I will quote him...

"...but what tartan - from which sept and clan?"

The issue is that Mr. Shapiro was (and is) a 3rd generation, Lithuanian-American, Jewish Computer Scientist, lacking the slightest connection to Scotland whatsoever, measured by blood, culture, or lifestyle. There was simply no compelling reason to select any pattern among the hundreds of existing designs."

So, now, we shall take a brief foray into the annals of History.

The term "tartan" most likely came from the French during the early 16th Century when there were strong dynastic ties between the countries. Although the plaid fabrics have become strongly identified with Scotland, similar techniques and patterns of woven material were not uncommon among the European cultures. It was the draped and kilted Highlander fighter, made heroic by poets and writers both inside and outside Gaelic culture that transformed this style into an identifying image for all of Scotland.

Use of the plaids became a national style. Certainly as late as the early 1700's the various tartan patterns were dictated by personal taste and regional tendencies rather than any specific clan affiliation. Numerous writings of the time attest to this.

The tartans became highly politically identified when the exiled Prince Charles Edward Stuart chose a form of the Highland costume as uniform

for his army. This was in 1745. If you will recall, James I, son of Mary, Queen of Scots became King of England upon the death of the never married Queen Elizabeth I of England. The (Scottish) Stuarts were Catholic, which was one of the key issues in the subsequent strife inside England. This was the heritage of Prince Charles (Bonnie Prince Charlie).

With the defeat of the Jacobites (of which we were just speaking), England issued a fairly inclusive sumptuary law, which forbade the wearing of any "Highland clothes". As a direct result, of course, wearing the plaid became a powerful political and social statement. This is the usual result of a sumptuary law.

The law was repealed in 1782.

A cultural patriotic interest in the old Tartans rekindled in the 1800s. With the romantic attachment Scotland had for the Stuarts, the arrival on the scene of the brothers Sobieski began a new stage in the identity and nature of the Tartan.

The Sobieski Stuarts arrived in Scotland in 1820, claiming to be the grandsons of Bonnie Prince Charlie. It was claimed that their father had been raised by an English Admiral to disguise his true parentage, and had in turn married a Polish Jewish countess by the name of Sobieski. The story is that they took Scotland society by storm.

It was these two brothers who in the 1840's published two definitive books on Scottish plaids, the *Vestiarium Scotium*, and *The Costume of the Clans*. In these books, the Sobieskis referred to a secret 16th Century manuscript, which they claimed to own, but was never seen by anyone else. These works linked specific Tartans to specific clans. This was the origin of the clan Tartan, as we know it today. It is generally believed that, although some historical veracity was involved, many of the Tartan setts (the basic unit of design which repeats to yield the pattern) identified by the brothers, were in reality created by the two of them, and assigned to a designated clan.

Armed with these surprising discoveries about the origin of the Tartans, my brother realized that he

was, in fact, particularly entitled to design his own plaid. This he undertook on his Macintosh computer. This too seems appropriate.

It took Daniel two years to design the pattern, and get weavers in Scotland to accept his design. In general, the setts are first mirrored, and then repeated to create the overall pattern. Dan fought the traditionalists, and eventually was able to commission the 20-yard bolt, from which was produced the first MacShapiro kilt.



The existence of the additional 12 yards opened up a multitude of strangely appropriate cross-cultural possibilities (or improbabilities). As the family's costumers, Bruce and I were prevailed upon to construct a series of Yarmulkes for the male members of the immediate clan, and for some of the family in the collateral branches. There are now MacShapiro Yarmulkes on two continents (North America and Australia).

In addition, my grandmother's brother-in-law (husband of her youngest sister), Dr. Ping Chia Kuo owns a Tam O'Shanter made from the material. We also managed to squeeze out a surprise bagpipe cover from the 4 yards we were allotted for the project.

In December of 1998, Dan took the kilt to St Andrew's Church in Ben Lomond, California to be

kirked. This blessing made the MacShapiro a formal Scottish Tartan.

References:

Cheape, Hugh, Tartan: The Highland Habit, National Museums of Scotland, 1991.

Shapiro, Daniel, private correspondence with the author

Online correspondence between Ellen Campbell, Susan Worland, and Marjorie McLaughlin, 1996, as provided to the author by Ellen Campbell.



ICG President's Message

There is no new message at the moment, but did you know that the previous (semi-)monthly ICG Presidential messages back to January 2000 are archived on the ICG's web site at <http://www.costume.org/messages/index.html> ?

While you are visiting the ICG web site, you may also want to check out the page devoted to the ICG Lifetime Achievement Awards at <http://www.costume.org/lifetime/lifetime.html>

You can even see Carl there -



Member Spotlight

This month's volunteers are *Denisen and Jay Hartlove*



Interview completed October 9, 2003

ST: Do have any pets?

Two cats – Phred and Ginger. Re-named after having been dubbed “Red” and “Whitey” by previous unimaginative owners. (Note – previous owner got rid of the long-haired cats because, as she put it, “they shed.” Really? Even the long-haired ones?) We are dancing fools, so the name pairing was obvious.

ST: A spouse or significant other?

Jay: Denisen.

Denisen: Jay. Married 7 years, together for 10.



ST: Any children?

Beautiful Katherine Grace Hartlove, nearly 3 years old (12/14/2000). No, Beautiful is not her first name. Some joker had once suggested we call her Hippity Hartlove. Thanks for sharing.

ST: Where are you currently living?

Pink and blue '60s tract house in Concord, California.

ST: Do you consider that your hometown?

Denisen: No, Morgan Hill is my hometown. Interestingly, the Silicon Valley has recently discovered the little town, and million dollar plus homes are popping up like weeds where once we boarded horses and picnicked in fields.



Jay: No, the sound of the surf in Santa Monica will always bear that distinction.



Jay as Captain Nemo

ST: Do you have a favorite vacation destination?

Denisen: A warm beach somewhere, with hot and cold running pina colodas and a daily massage.

Jay: Ditto. Usually in Mexico.



ST: favorite costume movie?

Denisen: Dangerous Liaisons, with Glenn Close, John Malkovich and Michelle Pfeiffer.

Jay: The Dark Crystal.



ST: Before others rent it, is it a good movie, or is it just good costumes?

Denisen: Both a good movie and fabulous costumes! Plus, it shows the clothing going on, layer by spectacular layer. And a riveting story as well. Love that the Marquise de Merteuil gets her just desserts at the end.

Jay: Movie: 7. Costumes: 10.

ST: Favorite Author(s) and/or books?

Denisen: Currently, Annie Lamott. I just finished her "Blue Shoe". Yum! For poetry, e.e. cummings.

Jay: Thich Nhat Hahn. His work speaks to me.



Dr. Phibes



ST: What are you currently reading?

Denisen: Potboiler – don't ask, I'm too embarrassed.

Jay: Taking a break after finishing my degree.

ST: What originally got you interested in costuming?

Jay: I'm a melodrama junkie. I find irresistible the notion that you can put on clothes and become someone whose life is full of adventure. When you get a costume right, you can just hear the theme music.



Denisen: Have always had the urge to dress up in my best clothes – as a child, angled for permission to put on my Easter dress and perform improvised plays in our backyard for an audience of neighbors. Later, I saw *The King and I*, and wanted to learn to dance, and to do so in Anna's gold ballgown. For masquerade interest, blame Jay! 8-)





ST: What are your favorite costuming topics (photography, research, storage hints, sewing ...)?

Denisen: Masquerade running, and using period styles and patterns to make non-historical costumes. At first, I simply made my attempts at historical clothing out of the "wrong" fabrics. Then I realized it was every bit as much fun to put together a uniform jacket top with a Georgian-gown-inspired bottom and make the whole thing out of something translucent . . . now I'm on a roll! Also, as of recently, costuming for children, and I'm compiling material for an article on same.

Jay: Integrating sculpture and clothing. This includes making clothes fit some new and interesting way. I adore the intensely tailored women's bustle jackets of the mid-1800s. Just yesterday I saw a design I instantly fell in love with: Donna Karan put an elongated, hip-hugging, silver porthole in the side of a clingy black knit evening gown. Excellent!



ST: Are you currently working on any costumes?

Denisen: About to start an 1875 day dress.

Jay: I'm designing Hellraiser Cenobites on my morning BART commute. Really worries the mundanes.

ST: Are you currently learning any new costuming techniques?

Denisen: Sewing Without Alcohol.

Jay: Fitting clothes to very small people (our 3 year old in particular).



ST: What costuming techniques would you like to learn?

Denisen. See above. Also lace application techniques, smocking, and Fasteners 101.

Jay: PVC.



ST: Favorite historic period?

Denisen: Bustles, presently. Yum. And late Georgian. Double-yum.

Jay: 1930s. Tailoring and style all the way.

ST: Favorite color?

Denisen: Pale, delicate pink. Or maybe sunny yellow. Also sapphire blue, magenta, forest green, etc., etc. Depends on my mood. Macy's asked me for a favorite color to identify myself; I was cranky, told them plaid.

Jay: Again with the drama. I'm drawn to rich colors and bold contrasts. My best work has been blue on white, purple on green, red on black, silver on purple. I like the look of subtle colors, but I don't seem to design with that palette.

ST: Favorite fabric?

Denisen: Taffeta - yards and rustling yards of it!

Jay: Wow, too many to choose from. Finding just the right fabric or material, one that does just what I want it to, is a magical moment worth seeking.

ST: Favorite food

Denisen: Strawberries fresh out of the fields in late July. Also, of course, champagne and chocolates.

Jay: Again, tough choice. I love to cook and I love thoughtfully prepared food. My favorite cooking quote is from Julia Child, who said,

"Cooking is all about courage!" I agree, and I feel the same way about costuming.

ST: Education/career?

Denisen: Degree - Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Day Job - Legal Secretary

Jay: Degree -Master of Science in Finance and Day Job - Securities Paralegal

(We say that with his degree, Jay'll know how to balance our checkbook, and with mine, I'll know why he wants to!)



If you hear a popping noise while sewing, your needle is dull. Replace it to avoid glitches in your stitches.

- **A tip from The Heath Hen Yarn and Quilt Shop, Martha's Vineyard**

You may delay, but time will not.
- Benjamin Franklin